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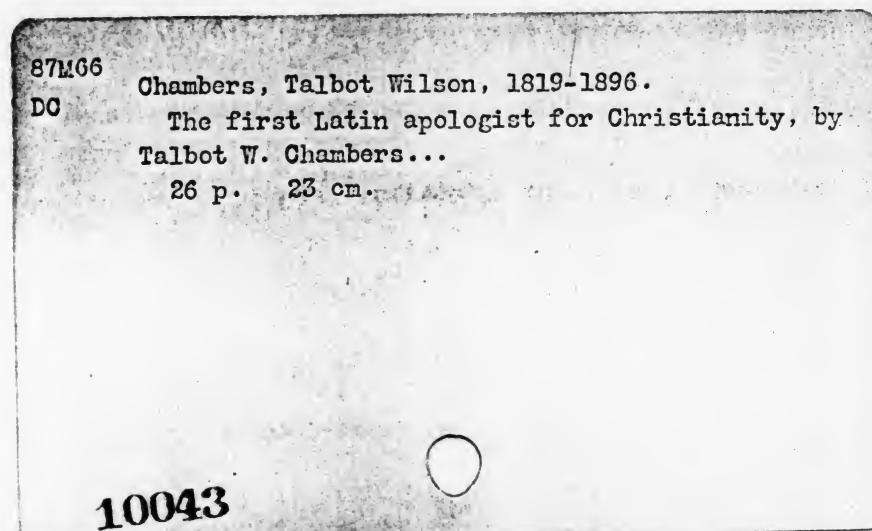
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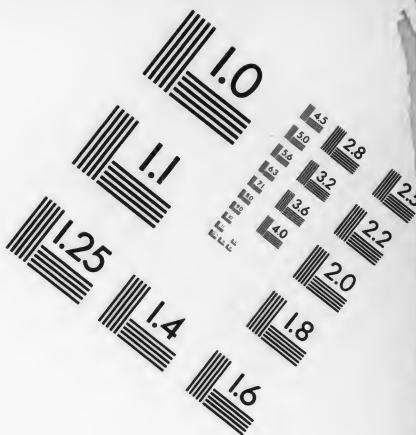
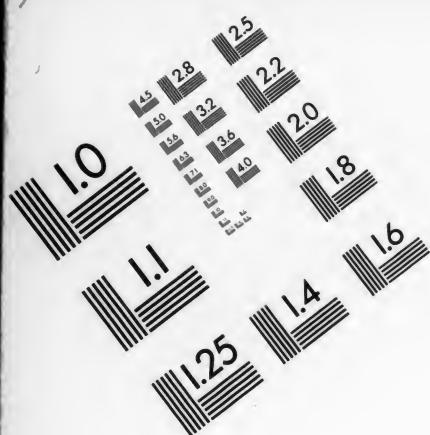


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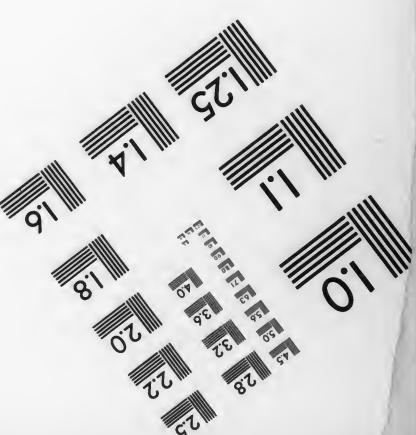
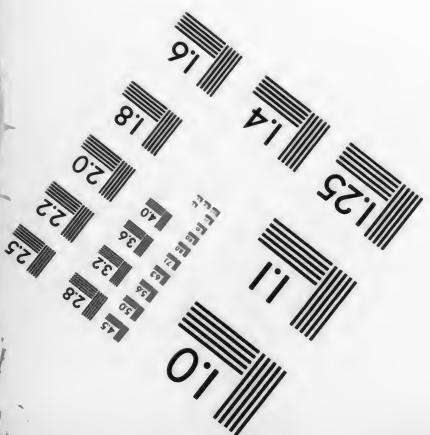
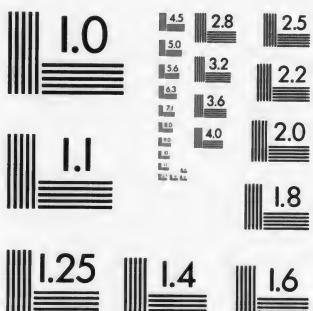
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# THE FIRST LATIN APOLOGIST

FOR

## CHRISTIANITY.

By Talbot W. Chambers, D. D.

It is only of recent years that the branch of theology concerned with the defence of the truth against opponents has been developed into a system and taken the name of Apologetics. Planck and Schleiermacher and Sack began the scientific treatment of the subject. But the materials for it have existed in every age from the beginning, yet in widely different forms. True, the fundamental questions have always been the same, but the form of the conflict has continually varied. Almost every century produced a new class of opponents whose objections took shape from the characteristic features of the time, and therefore required to be met with new weapons and a new exhibition of Christianity's inherent superiority over all that can be brought against it. Nor can we doubt that this will continue to be the case until the end. Meanwhile it is interesting to look back upon the past, and see how the early defenders of the faith acquitted themselves in the formidable debate.

The subject of this article, Marcus Minucius Felix, takes us near the beginning. He was preceded by Justin Martyr, Athenagoras and others, but they wrote in Greek, while Minucius was the first to clothe his arguments in a Latin dress. Of his birthplace, parentage and education, we know nothing. That he was of North African descent has been reasonably

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conjectured from the fact that he speaks of the orator Fronto as *Cirtensis nostra*, and Fronto, it is well known, was born of an Italian family in Cirta (the modern Constantine), in Africa. He came to Rome in the reign of Hadrian, and acquired a high reputation as rhetorician and statesman. Antoninus Pius\* made him preceptor to his two adopted sons, and afterwards Consul. Minucius seems to have resembled his distinguished townsmen, for it appears from the statements of Lactantius and Jerome, as well as from certain expressions of his own in his *Apology*, that he was a rhetorician and an advocate or juris-consult at Rome, where he resided, and that he at times took part in the proceedings against the Christians. But along with his bosom friend, Octavius, he was converted, and became an advocate of the faith he once endeavored to destroy. It does not appear that he ever entered the clerical state, but as a layman he served his new Master in a different yet important way arising from the circumstances of the time. Hitherto all Apologies had necessarily been in Greek, for the Churches of Rome and almost all the West were, so to speak, Greek religious colonies. Their language, their organization, their Scriptures, were Greek, and many vestiges and traditions show that their ritual was Greek. Through Greek the communication of the Churches with the East was constantly kept up. Greek was the commercial language throughout the Empire, and in it the Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote his philosophy. The Gospels and the Apostolic writings so soon as they became part of the public worship, were read, just as the Old Testament was, in Greek. The oldest inscriptions in the Catacombs are mostly in the same language. But the time came when this peculiarity ceased to exist. The spread of the Gospel and the

\* Renan reminds us that one evening when the Emperor was nearly sixty years old all the pictures of his pious youth returned to his remembrance, and he passed some delicious hours in calculating how much he owed to each one of the virtuous beings who had surrounded him. Among these he mentions Fronto, "who taught him the envy, duplicity and hypocrisy which belong to a tyrant, and the hardness which may exist in the heart of a patrician." (Comment. A. 11.)

separation of the East and the West, after the foundation of Constantinople, required that the Roman tongue should come into use. This began in North Africa where the Greek never prevailed farther East than Cyrenaica, and where the conquerors displaced the old Punic tongue by the Latin. It is with reason supposed that the earliest of the many Italic versions of the Scriptures on which Jerome grounded his Vulgate were of African origin. It was needful then to have a defence of the faith in the tongue now become dominant, and to adapt it to the characteristics of the Latin mind. It was not so much profound philosophical disquisition that was required as a practical enforcement of the claims of Christianity and a clear exhibition of its moral excellence. And it was to this task Minucius addressed himself, choosing the graceful form of a dialogue in which to set forth, in the speech of Cicero and Virgil, the truth on the highest themes of human thought.

His work has been preserved to us in a single manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, from which, however, it has frequently been reprinted from 1543 to 1881. At first by a strange blunder, (the confusion of *Octavianus* with *octavus*), it was published not as an independent work, but as the eighth book of the treatise of Arnobius, *Adversus nationes libri VII.*, which is given in the same codex. The error was corrected by Franciscus Baldūinus in 1560. The text is often uncertain and in many places manifestly corrupt, so that it is not easy always to ascertain the sense. Yet enough remains to have won high encomiums from acknowledged masters of style. Thus Renan in his little book on *Marc-Aurele* says that it is "the pearl of the apologetic literature of the last years of Marcus Aurelius," and Milman declares "Perhaps no late work, either Pagan or Christian, reminds us of the golden days of Latin prose so much as this." However, to avoid misapprehension it may be well to append the judgment of the latest German editor, Bernhard Dombart, (Erlangen 1881), who says that to one who looks only on the surface Minucius presents the appearance of a classic style, because he formed himself on

the ancient models and frequently made direct use of their expressions; but on a closer inspection it is apparent that in language he was a child of his time, a time in which archaisms, provincialisms and neologisms played a conspicuous part. Still he wrote with spirit and force, often has eloquent and effective passages, and sometimes puts a point with the neatness of a Tacitus, as in the clause, *Non eloquimur magna sed vivimus.*

The date of the work has been much contested, and is still *sub lita*. Some place it in the first quarter of the third century, probably during the peaceful reign of Alexander Severus. So Dr. Schaff who cites the authorities *pro* and *con*, with his usual skill and fairness, in his Church History, II. 841. Others (Eberts, Mangold, Dombart) put it back into the preceding century; and the veteran scholar, Theodor Keim, in his posthumous *Rom und Christentum* says it was written between A. D. 178 and 180, and probably in A. D. 187, in the beginning of the persecution under Marcus Aurelius. To this he is led by the mention of the orator Fronto, the well-known companion of the Emperor, and by the reference to the various forms of violence to which the Christians are said to be subjected. The matter is of importance only as settling the mutual relations of Tertullian and Minucius. As there are numerous passages in both which are strikingly similar, one must have borrowed from the other. But if Minucius flourished in the reign of Marcus Aurelius then he was the original writer, for the *Apologeticus* of Tertullian was not written until the reign of Septimus Severus, between A. D. 197 and 200.

The work may recount an actual discussion, but more probably is a rhetorical expansion and orderly arrangement of several such discussions. As such it displays no small literary ability. The author appears possessed of all the culture of his time, and is skilful in the delineation of nature and of character and of life. As a recent convert he treats the matter upon the surface, by no means entering into the depths of Christian doctrine, but touching only such points as were handled by the Apostle Paul in his address at Athens. But

there is no reason for inferring from this, as do Renan and Kuhn, that the author was ignorant of the specific tenets of the Christian faith, or was a liberal Christian of the Deistic stamp. It did not belong to his purpose to treat of sin and grace, of Christ and redemption, of the Holy Ghost and His operations. Perhaps he did not feel himself qualified to handle these high themes, or, more probably, he wished to perform the preliminary work of dispelling prejudice and preparing men for a candid view of the peculiar truths of the Gospel. Hence he dwells upon the points in which Christians presented the sharpest and most obvious contrast to the prevailing heathenism of Rome. While attacking the follies and sins of idolatry, all the positive truths he sets forth are the unity of the Godhead, the universality of Divine providence, the resurrection of the body and future retribution, together with the actual results of these tenets upon the hearts and lives of Christians. "Christianity is to him both theoretically and practically the true philosophy which teaches the only true God, and leads to true virtue and piety."

The dialogue form of the work was doubtless in deference to the taste of antiquity for that mode of discussion. It does not have the grace and ease and liveliness of the Platonic writings, but is more allied to Cicero's well-known discussion *De Natura Deorum*, from which it borrows both thoughts, and the style and tone in which they are expressed. Minucius does not set up men of straw which fall down of themselves, or can easily be overthrown, but makes the heathen interlocutor state the very substance and force of the popular objections to Christianity as it was regarded by intelligent Romans of that day. We propose to give a rapid *précis* of the argument, using for this purpose the suggestions derived from a variety of sources, but constantly referring to the original.

In a graceful introduction the author begins by saying that in thinking of his departed friend Octavius Januarius with whom he had long been united in the closest intimacy, nothing impressed him so deeply as the recollection of the weighty

discourse by which Octavius had been the means of winning over to the truth their common friend, Cæcilius. The occasion and the features of this discourse he now proceeds to recount. Octavius had been called to Rome both by his engagements as an advocate and by his love for Minucius. It was a very joyful reunion. After some days they took advantage of a vacation of the courts to visit Ostia to enjoy the salt water bathing. There they met Cæcilius Natalis, another friend of Minucius, but still a heathen, and, as appears from his reasoning, a philosopher of the sceptical school of the New Academy. One fine morning as they strolled together along the beach, a statue of Serapis came in sight. As soon as Cæcilius saw it he raised his hand to his mouth and gave the customary sign of adoration. Whereupon Octavius rebuked Minucius because he had the heart to leave so dear and intimate a friend in the darkness of gross superstition. Then in animated conversation they continued their walk by the sea, at times pausing to join in the children's sport as they strove to see who could throw shells the farthest distance in skimming the surface of the waves. While they were thus engaged Cæcilius paid no attention, but stood apart, silent, uneasy and with a cloud upon his brow. When asked the reason of his grave demeanor, he answered that he had been vexed by the speech of Octavius covertly charging him with ignorance, and proposed that there should be a friendly discussion of the question at issue. This was agreed to, and the two friends sat down on the large stones placed for the protection of the baths, Minucius taking his place between them to act as umpire of the debate.

This was opened by Cæcilius. He began by assuming the position of doubt which at that period was generally accepted, and inveighed indignantly at the new blind faith which, notwithstanding the constant flux of earthly things and men's total inability to understand the supernatural, assumed to be able to furnish definite views of God and divine things. Much better is it to submit humbly to the traditions of our forefathers. The Roman deities had made Rome great, had given her the victory

in countless battles, had laid at the feet of the city on the Tiber the dominion of the world. Do not the Romans govern and reign without your God? The greatest and best portion of you are the prey of want and cold, are naked and hungry. Your God suffers this, and seems not to know it. Either he cannot, or will not, help his own; thus he is either weak or unjust. He can help those who come to life again, but he does nothing for the living. It is the height of imprudence and folly for a wretched set of ignorant men and credulous women to reject our ancient deities, and sacrifice all present earthly good in the empty prospect of that which is far distant and uncertain. Yet as it is the nature of evil to grow, this hateful system has spread itself everywhere, a religion of great secret crimes, promiscuous incest and frightful abominations. I hear that they adore the head of an ass, that basest of creatures. Some say that they worship the *virilia* of their pontiff and priest, and adore the nature as it were of their common parent. [This was simply transferring to the Christians the slander circulated about the Jews. Thus there was circulated, as Tertullian tells us, a picture of a figure with the ears of an ass, clothed with a toga, holding a book in its hands, with these words inscribed beneath, "The God of the Christians, born of an ass." So likewise among the ruins of the palace of the Cæsars in Rome, there has recently been found a sketch, roughly drawn with charcoal on the wall, representing a man with an ass's head hanging on a cross, and below, in rude Greek letters, "Alexamenos adores his God." Evidently a scoff of the soldiers at some Christian comrade.] Of the story about the initiation of novices Cæcilius says it is as much to be detested as it is well known. Then he recites the slaughter of an infant, the dividing of its limbs and the licking up of its blood, by which the partakers are pledged together and covenanted to mutual silence. At their feasts when they have become intoxicated, a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked by throwing a morsel beyond him to rush and spring, and by the leap he extinguishes the light, and in the darkness thus occasioned deeds of the most

abominable lust are committed and the wildest orgies celebrated, and this in an assembly where persons of every sex and every age are gathered. Things so utterly impious and detestable, and only to be mentioned with apology would not be reported unless there were some foundation in truth. But Cæcilius states them upon the authority of "our Cirtensian," the orator Fronto, who appears to have been present at some of the prosecutions. And that this testimony is true, that the shameless features here only partly stated really belong to the Christians, is shown by the fact that they carefully conceal their cultus. They have no temples, nor altars, nor images. They do not speak in public, and hold no public assemblies. Their one isolated God, whom as the god of the Jews the Romans enslaved, together with the people that worshiped him, is, they insist, while invisible yet everywhere present, anxiously caring for each individual and at the same time upholding the whole world. Nay, they go so far in their silliness as to announce the destruction of the heavens and the earth, the present divine order of things, and yet they confidently cherish for themselves the old wives' fable of a resurrection from the dead. In this delusion they oppose the cremation of the dead, and expect for themselves a life of endless felicity, while others as unrighteous must suffer eternal punishment, and all this as an arbitrary appointment of God. Yet manifestly the body of the dead is resolved into dust, and in innumerable ages not a single individual has come back from the grave. And their credulity prevents them from seeing that even in the present world they are altogether forsaken of God since they are exposed to trials and persecutions, so that, wretched as they are, they neither rise again nor do they really live in the meanwhile. Cease, therefore, to pry into the regions of the sky, or explore the destinies of a world which you are wholly unable to understand. Or, if you will philosophize, do it after the manner of Socrates or Simonides who modestly confessed that we cannot fathom the essence of the divine. This position of doubt is the only middle ground

between a childish superstition and the destructive denial of all religion.

Having thus spoken Cæcilius ended with a smile of triumph. "What can Octavius, a man of Plautian stock,\* chief of the bakers and last of the philosophers, say to this?" Minucius cautioned him against a premature exaltation. His fine speech was indeed enticing, but the question was to be settled not by brilliant eloquence but solid argument. Cæcilius deprecated this as a partisan utterance unbecoming an umpire, and Minucius apologized.

Now begins Octavius. He will wash away the reproaches upon Christianity with a stream of truthful speech. But he cannot pass in silence the wavering character of his opponents position. He says he believes in the Gods, and again he is considering whether he does believe or not, so that his answer rests on no firm ground. This is not owing to any artifice on his part but arises from the actual uncertainty of one who does not know the right way. The truth alone will deliver him from his perplexity. Then Octavius proceeds to consider matters in detail. He says that the argument of Cæcilius has three heads.

I. The first concerns the *knowledge of God*. Cæcilius is displeased that poor uncultivated people should discuss heavenly things. But every man without distinction of race or condition is endowed with reason. It is a gift of nature. Even the philosophers themselves for the most part emerged from the people. The rich are used to gaze more upon their wealth than upon heaven, while our people though poor have found out wisdom and imparted it to others. Cæcilius is right in saying that man must learn to know himself, and to know the world, its essence and its origin, whether collected from the elements, or composed of atoms, or a divine creation. But to do this, he must know the universe and even the deity, without which he cannot know

\* This is aimed at the lowly origin of the Christians. Plautus is said when in need to have labored at a baker's hand-mill, a very menial occupation. The gibe at Octavius is that however eminent he might be at his mean handicraft, he was disqualified for a philosophical discussion.

even humanity. It is man's distinction from the brute creation that he looks upward and knows God. They have no reason, no sense, no eyes, who derive the world from a fortuitous concourse of atoms. What can be plainer to him who opens his eyes than that there is one supreme intelligence that governs all things? The heavens, the stars, the succession of days and years, seed-time and harvest, the ebb and flow of the ocean, the formation of the animals, and above all that of man himself, indicate a divine artificer. All is so orderly and harmonious. Just as when one enters a house exquisitely proportioned and furnished he cannot doubt that a master presided over it. The only question one can ask is whether the author be one or many, but even that not seriously. For why more than one? Even the bees have but one king, and the herds but one leader. How can man divide the power at work in the heavens? No: God, the Father of all, has neither beginning nor end. He gives birth to all but gives eternity to Himself. Before the world, He was to Himself instead of the world. He orders all that is by a word; arranges it by His wisdom; perfects it by His power. Man does not see Him, does not comprehend Him, for He is greater than all perceptions, is infinite, immeasurable, known only to Himself. The human heart is too narrow to conceive Him. He needs no name. Names are required only where we separate a multitude into individuals. Every God is alone, and therefore God is His whole name. Every other title, Father, King, Lord, implicates Him in the earthly, the mortal. Nor am I singular in this opinion. When people look up to heaven they say simply, "God," "God is great," "God is true," "if God permits." Is that the utterance of the people in general, or of a professed Christian? Even the poets speak of one father of gods and men. Virgil tells of one God whose Spirit pervades the universe. Thales declared God to be the Spirit that formed all things out of water; the first philosopher who disputed about heavenly things is therefore in absolute agreement with us. The same is true of Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras. Even Democritus and Epicurus,

weak as they were, were not wholly destitute of the true faith. A host of others is mentioned. Plato has spoken in the plainest way, only his discourse is sometimes soiled by a mixture of merely civil belief, but his *Timæus* agrees almost wholly with us. So that the philosophers hold to one God with many names, and one might suppose either that Christians are now philosophers, or that the philosophers were then already Christians.

II. The *Argument from Antiquity*. If the world is really governed by one God, the appeal to ancient beliefs should not win our consent to the opposite error. For our ancestors had such an easy faith in falsehoods that they believed the monstrous absurdities of a Scylla, a chimaera, a hydra, centaurs, and the transformation of men into beasts. Thus they became credulous in divine things. Devotion toward kings and leaders, to whom statues were erected, led to the worship of such heroes. Here history agrees with us. Euhemerus describes exactly the origin of the gods, their birthplace, their countries, their exploits and where they were buried. Saturn fled before Jupiter to Latium. Jupiter reigned in Crete and died there. And so Prodicus and Persæus affirm. Even the mysteries contain stories of Isis weeping over Osiris, and Ceres seeking Proserpine. Jupiter is suckled by a she-goat. The form and appearance of the gods contradict their claims. Vulcan is a lame God; Apollo smooth-faced after so many ages; Æsculapius well bearded; Neptune with sea-green eyes; Minerva with eyes bluish-grey; Juno with ox-eyes; Mercury with winged feet; Pan with hoofed feet; Saturn with feet in fetters; Janus with two faces; Diana is a huntress with her robe girded up high, or has many and fruitful breasts, or is horrible with three heads and many hands; and so with the rest. Who, indeed, is able to recount it all? But from ignorant parents we get such fables, and elaborate them in our studies, especially in the verses of the poets; for which reason Plato rightly banished from his imaginary commonwealth Homer, the creator of your gods. Who does not see the senselessness of this practice in the gods of to-day, when Romulus is deified by a false oath and

Juba by the good will of the Mauritanians, when old men [he refers to Vespasian] prefer to remain mortal and fear to be made gods? Are these who were born and then died really gods? For if so, one might ask why are they not born in our day also? Has Jupiter become too old? If they continued to propagate, heaven and earth could not contain the gods that would be produced, but the propagation has doubtless ceased because these fables are no longer believed. It is plain then that these beings were nothing but men, and they who worship their images were deceived by the perfection of the art shown in those images. Still it is a folly to make gods out of metal, molten or carved. The dumb animals know better, for the mice gnaw these statues, and the spiders weave webs over them without fear. Thus in blind attachment to their ancestors originated the Roman superstition of venerating silver and gold. If we investigate old usages we must laugh as well as weep. For instance, the foolish worship of the Luperci, the Galli, the Salii. The defence of the general madness is the multitude of the mad people. Some indeed say that it was the piety of the Roman people, and not their valor, that established their empire. Certainly their righteousness was distinguished from the beginning, since we know that they were a colony of criminals, a patricidal king, men who stole their wives and then warred against the kindred of these women, men who carried fire and sword in every direction. Whatever they hold is the spoil of their audacity. Their temples are built on the ruins of cities and the murder of priests. The worship of vanquished gods is open mockery. Not because they were religious did the Romans become great, but because they were sacrilegious with impunity. How could their gods help them? Romulus and Picus, Pavor and Pallor, how could such deities, the foster-children of Roman superstition, be the cause of their growth? Nor was it the foreign gods; for if these could not help their own people, how could they avail for others? Or, is it said that it was because of the greater modesty of Roman maidens and the superior piety of Roman priests? But the greater number of the vestal

virgins were punished for unchastity, and the impunity of the rest was due not to their merit, but to their better fortune. No where is uncleanness more common than in the temples and among the altars, and the chambers of the priests are more impure than the stews themselves. Finally, how many mighty kingdoms were there of old, Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, which yet had no pontiffs, nor salii, nor vestals, nor augurs! Cæcilius has referred with special emphasis to auspices and auguries. How easy it is to confute him! Regulus was imprisoned despite the bird omen; the consul Paulus had greedy chickens [a favorable omen] before the disastrous defeat of Cannæ; against all signs Caius Cæsar went to Africa, yet had he only an easier voyage and a speedier victory. Who dare talk of oracles? Amphiaraus prophesied after his death, but before it knew not the treachery of his own wife. Tiresias could see the future, but being blind could not see the present. Ennius composed the replies of Apollo, and Demosthenes charged the Pythia with *Philippizing*. Whatever is true in these responses is due to the action of *dæmones*, such as Plato speaks of. These unclean spirits dwell in the sanctuaries and by their afflatus attain the authority as of a present deity. They control the flight of birds, animate the fibres of the entrails, direct the lots, inspire the seers and the magicians, possess the bodies of men, and set the Bacchantes off in their furious course. Many of you know that the demons themselves have confessed this when driven out from men "by the torment of our words and the fire of our prayers." Even Saturn, Serapis, and Jove and others, overcome by pain, acknowledge who they are; and certainly they would not lie to their own shame, especially when any of you are standing by.

III. *The Demons cause the prevailing hatred and lies against the Christians.* Believe us who now repent of our old prejudices that these prejudices are unjustifiable. We once believed that Christians worshipped monsters, devoured infants, joined in incestuous banquets. It never occurred to us that it was only demons who circulated these reports which were never

enquired into nor proved ; that no Christian ever sought pardon or favour by betraying such atrocities ; that no one ever blushed that he became a Christian, but only because he had not done so earlier. How perverse we were ! Temple-robbers, incestuous persons, parricides had a fair trial, but Christians we would not listen to for a moment. We tortured them to compel them to a lie in order to escape death. And if the pain proved too great for some infirm believer, and he renounced his faith, we acquitted him at once as if the simple denial atoned for all his misdeeds. Do you not see that from the experience of to-day ? For if reason and not the instigation of a demon were to judge, Christians would have been urged not to disavow their faith, but to confess themselves guilty of incests and like abominations. From the demons also come all false reports. It is they who make you believe that we honor an ass's head as something divine. Who is so foolish as to do this, or so much more foolish as to believe such a story ? It is you rather who with your *Epona* consecrate the whole ass in your stables, and adorn the same together with Isis in your religious fervor. You also venerate and offer up the heads of oxen and sheep, and you dedicate gods, half man and half goat, and gods with the faces of dogs and lions. With the Egyptians, you adore and feed the bull Apis, and you make no objection to their sacred rites in honor of serpents, crocodiles, birds and fishes. Even the pungency of an onion you fear as much as Isis, and the base wind of the body as Serapis. He who fables about our worshipping the *pudenda* of the priest ascribes to us what really belongs to himself. Such obscene worship may exist among those with whom immodesty passed for a fine art, who envy the license of prostitutes, who indulge in unnatural lusts, who cease their shameless course rather from satiety than from shame. Such infamies we cannot listen to ; it would be a disgrace to defend ourselves farther. You invent, concerning chaste and modest persons, things of which we could not believe that they occurred anywhere, did we not see them among you.

But, you say, we worship a criminal and his cross ! Far from it. A criminal deserves not, an earthly being is not able, to be esteemed divine. The Egyptians indeed, choose a man whom they may worship. A false flattery gives to princes the title of gods whereas honor and love are their more rightful due. Yet men invoke their deity ; they pray to their images ; and it is safer to swear falsely by the genius of Jupiter than by that of the king. Crosses, moreover, we neither worship nor desire. You who consecrate wooden images adore crosses perhaps as parts of your gods, for your very standards, your banners and flags, what are they but gilded crosses ? A ship with sails, a military yoke set up, a man praying with extended hands, have the form of a cross. This sign therefore is either supported by a natural reason, or your own religion is formed in regard to it. We are initiated, you say, by blood and the slaughter of an infant. Who can believe this but one who is capable of doing it ? You expose your children to wild beasts, or strangle them, or destroy them even before birth. And your gods ! Saturn devoured his sons. In Africa parents sacrificed their own children. Human sacrifices were offered among the Tauri and the Galli. The Roman sacrificers buried alive a Greek man and a Greek woman, and to this day Jupiter Latiaris is worshipped by them with murder. Cataline conspired under a compact of blood, Bellona's worship is steeped in gore, and epilepsy is healed with human blood. Similar are those who devour wild beasts from the arena fattened with the flesh of men. To us it is not lawful to see or hear of homicide, and we do not use in our food the blood even of eatable animals. The story of our incestuous banqueting is another false plot of the demons. Even your Fronto joined in the calumny. But do not such things belong to yourselves ? Among the Persians the commerce of sons and mothers is permitted, and in Egypt that of brothers and sisters. Your histories and tragedies relate such things for your pleasure, and your gods perform them ; hence incest is often detected among you and always permitted. Indeed it is inevitable, since your promis-

euous concubinage must needs bring you in contact with children you have exposed or abandoned. As for us we maintain modesty not merely in appearance, but in heart. We abide by a single marriage, and have either but one wife for the sake of children, or none. Our feasts are not only modest, but temperate; seriousness controls hilarity. We maintain pure speech and still purer bodies. Many are celibates through life, more for enjoyment than from pride; and so far are we from incestuous desires that some blush even at the thought of a modest intercourse.

Nor are we people of the lowest class because we refuse your honors and purple robes, or factious because we agree in one mind. Nor are we "garrulous in corners," since you either blush or fear to hear us in public. Our growth shows not our error, but our repute. In such a course of life as we pursue, our original number remains undiminished, and strangers increase it. We distinguish each other not by an outward mark, but by the tokens of innocence, humility and love in which we all are brethren, but which you do not know, for you do not acknowledge one another as brethren unless indeed for the purpose of fratricide. You think that we conceal our worship because we have no temples or altars. But what image am I to make of God, since man himself is the image of God? And what temple, since the whole world which He made cannot contain Him? Should I not dedicate to Him my own spirit rather than one little building? What oblation shall I make? Shall I ungratefully throw back His own gifts which He bestowed for my use? No: a good disposition, a pure mind, a clear conscience, the saving of other men, these are the best sacrifices. Certainly we can neither show nor see the God we worship. We believe in Him because while we see Him not, we perceive His works. We see not the wind or the sun, but only their effects, and how can we see the Spirit who is their Lord? We see not our own souls, how can we see Him? But this does not hinder Him from seeing and directing all. Even the sun, a mere creature, is fixed fast in the heaven,

yet it is diffused over all lands equally. How much more is God who made all thing everywhere present?

Nor let us flatter ourselves because of our multitude. Men seem many to themselves, but to God we are very few. We distinguish people and nations; to God this whole world is one family, and he unlike an earthly king sees it directly and thoroughly, for we live not only in His eyes but in His bosom. You deride the Jews, and affirm that their superstition, their temples and altars, availed them nothing. But you forget that in the days of their uprightness and piety, from a few they became many, from poor became rich, from being servants became kings, and often with a few unarmed men, even when fleeing, at God's command they became victors, the very elements striving on their behalf. Read their Scripture or if you prefer Roman writings, the books of Josephus or of Antoninus Julianus. There you will learn that God forsook them only when they forsook Him, and that nothing befell them which had not been predicted in case of their being obdurate. Is the future conflagration of the world incredible? It is a vulgar error not to believe it. What wise man does not know that all that had a beginning, even heaven itself, must come to end? Have not Stoics and Epicureans foretold the final fire? Plato says that though the world was made eternal and indestructible, yet to God Himself, its author, it is both dissoluble and mortal. Thus the philosophers reason as we do, not because we follow them but they learn from us, imitating, but also corrupting, divine truth. Thus the doctrine of another life is set forth by Pythagoras, and especially Plato, but in a disfigured form. They teach that the soul survives death and passes into a new body, but add the misrepresentation that it passes into the forms of birds and beasts—a sentiment worthy only of a buffoon. Still it is enough for the argument if your wise men agree with us in some measure. And who now is so foolish as to deny that God who first created man can restore him again? Do you think that whatever escapes our dull eyes is therefore lost from God? Bodies may be resolved into ashes or

smoke, but they still exist in Him in their elements. Nor do we fear any loss from cremation, but we use the ancient and better custom of burying in the earth. See therefore how for our comfort all nature suggests a future resurrection ! The sun sinks and arises, stars pass away and return, flowers wilt and bloom again, seeds decay and revive. As one now waits for the spring of the year, so may he wait for the spring-time of the body ? Most men in the consciousness of what they deserve rather desire than believe that after death they shall be no more, and their error is confirmed by their present impunity owing to God's patience. But do not the books of the learned, the sayings of the poets, predict to them the Stygian marsh and eternal torments ? And what worse do we say ? Nor can you comfort yourselves with the thought that this occurs by fate, for you have your freedom. And it is not a man's social position but his conduct that comes under judgment.

That many of us are called poor is not our disgrace but our glory. Luxury weakens the soul, frugality strengthens it. And yet who can be called poor who does not desire the possession of others ? And no one is so poor as every man is at his birth. Birds live without any patrimony, and day by day the cattle are fed, and still these creatures are born for us, all which we possess if we do not lust after them. Without baggage we march easier. Did we count wealth needful for our welfare we should ask it of God, and He would give it to us. But we rather scorn riches and seek after virtue. Bodily suffering is not punishment, but a warfare which invigorates the frame. Even your own heroes have become illustrious through trials. We do not suffer because God despises us or is unable to help, but because He is refining us as gold in the fire. How fair a spectacle is the Christian when he enters the lists with affliction, and does battle against menaces and tortures ; when he scoffs at the terror of the hangman, and maintains his liberty against kings and princes, yielding only to God whose he is. Like a conqueror he tramples upon the man who condemns him, for he is victor who obtains that for which he contends,

which is not deliverance, but the approval of his Lord. He fights under the eye of God and is sure of his reward. He may seem to be miserable ; he cannot really be found to be so. You exalt some of your sufferers to the skies ; such as Mutius Scævola, who having missed his aim in an attempt to kill the king, voluntarily thrust the mistaking hand into the fire. Yet how many of us have suffered not only the hand but the whole body to be burned without a complaint, when deliverance was in our power ! But why should I compare our men with Mucius or Regulus, when our very children, inspired with patience, despise your racks and wild beasts and all other tortures ? And do you not see that no one is willing without reason to undergo punishment, or is able without God to bear tortures ? Or are you deceived by the fact that men who know not God abound in riches, and honor, and power ? Miserable men ! they are raised higher that they may fall the deeper. They are fattened as beasts for the shambles ; they are crowned as victims for the altar. Some are lifted up to empire that they may make the greatest misuse of their power to their own undoing. For apart from God what happiness can there be when death comes ? Are you a king, and rich, and proud of the fasces and the purple ? Still you are alone in face of the dread necessity, and carry a heavy burden during life's short journey. You shine in the purple but are sordid in mind. With reason, therefore, do we renounce your amusements and spectacles. We know that they arose from your heathen worship, and we condemn their mischievous influence : people brawling in the chariot games, murder taught in the gladiatorial contests, debauchery and adultery represented in the theatres, and emasculated actors depicting the shameless acts of your gods. You demand murder in fact while you weep over it in fiction.

Men censure our aversion to libation cups and aught connected with idol sacrifices, yet this is not a confession of fear but an assertion of liberty. We know that God's gifts cannot be corrupted by any agency, but we abstain lest you should think that we submit to the demons to whom libation has been

made, or that we are ashamed of our religion. We are not afraid of flowers ; we gather the lily and the rose in spring ; we strew them on our couches and wear them on our bosoms ; but pardon us for not placing them as chaplets on our heads, for we are accustomed to take in the scent with our nostrils and not with the back of the head or the hair. Nor do we cover the dead with garlands, for if they are happy, they feel no want, and if miserable they are beyond the refreshment of flowers. We bury our dead in the same quiet way in which we live, not binding to us a fading wreath, but wearing one that comes to us from God, alive with imperishable flowers. Thus we both shall rise again in blessedness, and are already living in happy contemplation of the future. Let Socrates, the Athenian jester, shut himself up in his avowed ignorance ; let Arcesilaus also, and Carneades and Pyrrho, and all the race of sceptics, doubt on ; let Simonides procrastinate for ever ; we despise the bent brows of the philosophers whom we know to be corrupters of the truth and always eloquent against the vices they practice ; we who bear wisdom not in our dress but in our minds, we do not speak great things, but we live them. We boast that we have attained what they sought for with the greatest eagerness but were not able to find.

When Octavius had finished his speech we all stood for some time in astonishment. I was lost in admiration of the way in which he had adorned those things which it is easier to think than to say, both by arguments and examples, and by authorities. He had refuted the ill-disposed with the very weapons of the philosophers with which they are armed, and had moreover shown the truth not only as easy but as agreeable. While I was turning these things over in my mind, Cæcilius broke forth : "I congratulate my friend Octavius and also myself ; and I do not wait for the decision. Even thus we have conquered ; not unjustly do I assume to myself the victory. He indeed has conquered me, but I have a triumph over my error. Upon the chief points at issue, concerning Providence and concerning

God, I yield, and I agree also as to the purity of the sect which is now my sect. There are some other matters on which I need instruction, but as the sun in declining we will defer them till to-morrow." I too expressed my pleasure at the result, and the more as I was now spared the disagreeable duty of acting as umpire.

So we all separated with joy, Cæcilius over his conversion, Octavius over his victory, and I over the conversion of the one and the victory of the other.

To an ordinary reader of the outline of Minucius's argument as here given, it would seem as remarkable for what it omits as for what it contains. There is not a word about the Trinity, or the Incarnation, or the Atonement, or the Holy Ghost, or the need and method of Justification, or the Second Advent, nay, not even about that which is the very citadel of modern Apologetics, the person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor does there drop from the orator's lips any expression of the gratitude, love and devotion which a Christian always feels toward his Redeemer. The reason of this has sometimes been sought in the supposed position of Minucius as only an incipient believer, standing in the fore-court of the temple, and, therefore, handling only those topics with which he was familiar. But it is not easy to see how he could believe what he here confesses without believing a great deal more. It is more natural to suppose that he adapted his argument to the class he meant to reach, and insisted on those points, the admission of which would logically involve the adoption of the whole Christian system, viz. : the existence and unity of God, the universality of His government of the world, the absurdity of idolatry, the falseness of the accusations made against Christians, their superior morals, their fortitude in sufferings, their faith in the resurrection of the body, and their present enjoyment in the knowledge and worship of God. No appeal is made to the Scriptures, because the authority of these was not acknowledged by his opponents. But if these opponents should be satisfied as to the ethical claims of the sect,

the step would be a short one to the cordial reception of the doctrinal and Scriptural basis upon which Christian Ethics rests and always has rested.

But while the discussion is thus apparently superficial and limited, in the course of its expression is given to certain points which are still of interest notwithstanding the vast changes that have occurred during sixteen centuries. Among these is the vigorous rebuke to Agnosticism. "Nothing in Christianity," said Octavius, "more excites the anger of Cæcilius than its claim to be in possession of assured truth." At the close of the heathen's speech he laid it down thus: "In my opinion things which are uncertain ought to be left as they are." The confession of ignorance is the height of wisdom. He belonged to a large class in the days of the Empire. They had no longer any heart for the old religion, yet they did not venture directly to break with it. They reckoned it a sign of culture no longer to hold the ancient creed with exactness, and allowed themselves occasionally to scoff at it. Yet they were unwilling to have existing traditions disturbed, and so rejected all religious innovators on the ground that nothing can be determined with certainty. Such persons are to be met with in every age. They are incapable of profound knowledge and touch the subject of religion only on the surface. They deem it a mark of good-breeding not to dispute much upon such a topic, and whenever pressed somewhat closely seek refuge in the seeming impossibility of discovering the truth. But Minucius insists not only that truth may be, but that it actually has been ascertained. Man's own nature and his observation of the external world have furnished him with a certain and sufficient knowledge of divine things, so that it was only an affectation of wisdom and humility to boast of being in perpetual doubt. The refutation of the argument drawn from oracles and auspices is still of use in our day when the truth as it is in Jesus is attacked on the ground of occult powers of nature, or of messages from the unseen world, or of revelations that have no historical basis whatever. Superstition is the same now as it

was then. If men do not have the truth, or having it reject it, they must needs turn to fables. They cannot stand in *equilibrio*.—The existence of evil spirits was never denied or doubted by the early disciples. And they used the fact to explain some of the forms of portentous wickedness by which they were surrounded, in this following the example of Him who said in His parable, "An enemy hath done this." The cruel and insensate calumnies propagated concerning Christians indicate the amount of ignorant prejudice against which they had to contend, and they teach a lesson of patience to all who in other times and circumstances are spoken against falsely. On the other hand, the retort based upon the gross immoralities of heathenism, occurring not only in the lives of men, but in the narratives concerning the gods themselves, is still of use as suggesting the invariable characteristic of all religions of mere earthly origin. The stream cannot rise higher than its fountain, and if men deify their fellows, human sins as well as human virtues must share in the apotheosis. No trace of the asceticism which soon became common is found in the argument of Octavius. Marriage is recognized as lawful, and the only requisition made is that it should be monogamous. So the good things of this world are enjoyed but with moderation and sobriety. We hear nothing of those who "forbid to marry and command to abstain from meats." Nor is there any praise of voluntary poverty as an eminent virtue. It is admitted that Christians are for the most part poor, but this is regarded as an appointment of Providence to which they cheerfully submit, because it is God's will, and because it may be made a means of grace so that while poor enough in worldly goods, they are rich toward God.

Because Minucius mentions Euhemerus, it is not necessary to suppose that he held his theory that the mythological deities were originally mere mortal men raised to the rank of Gods on account of the benefits which they had conferred upon mankind. He dealt with the facts of the case. The treatise of Euhemerus had been translated into Latin by Ennius, and had found large

acceptance among the cultivated Romans. This being the case Minucius makes an argument *ad hominem*, and skillfully presses the weak points of the system, holding up to ridicule the manifold and manifest absurdities involved in a pantheon filled with such beings. Nor can any modern attempt to develope a symbolical meaning out of these monstrosities relieve them from the actual character and influence which the Apologist lays to their charge. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body was defended in the beginning very much as it is now. Acknowledging it as the assured belief of the Christians, the disputant on the one hand points to the analogies of nature, and on the other to the power of God for whom nothing is too hard. He certainly can re-form that which He formed at first. Here occurs an observation of interest in our own day. The Romans were used to burn the bodies of their dead, but Christians interred them, not however because cremation would put a difficulty in the way of resurrection, for nothing perishes to the eye of God, but because the other mode is ancient and better. The endlessness of future punishment is stated without reserve and in unqualified terms, and the more because the doctrine, unlike its fate in our day, was universally accepted by the heathen whose poets speak freely of the black abyss and fiery river and the eternal torments. The simple and robust faith of the Ante-Nicene age had no difficulty in taking the words of Scripture in their obvious meaning. And they traced the denial of a future state where it obtained among their contemporaries to a well grounded fear that such a renewed existence held out no hopeful prospect to them. "They would prefer to be altogether extinguished rather than to be restored for the purpose of punishment." Persecution for conscience's sake was borne with fortitude and patience, even by delicate women and young children. This was because they were supported by a consciousness of the presence and favor of God. The flames of the stake were only a refiner's fire, and the sufferers would rather have what seemed such a wretched lot than abound in riches and honors which at last would only precipitate them into a

profounder abyss. Error has had its martyrs as well as truth, but in this case it was not fanaticism or simple obstinacy, as its enemies and among them the benign Marcus Aurelius asserted, but a conviction of spiritual truth. And it is no small debt that the subsequent ages owe to the heroic courage and invincible constancy of these sufferers who insured the triumph of Christ's gospel. It is not so much the amount of suffering that excites admiration as the spirit with which it was borne. Men, women and children submitted to prolonged and excruciating agonies, not in any temper of stony hardness, much less in wrath and revenge, but like their divine Master, with calm self-possession, humble resignation, gentle meekness, triumphant hope and forgiving charity. All was in the spirit of Him who said, "Being reviled we bless: being persecuted we suffer it." And thus the witness borne in deed and word was perfected in the witness of blood when the crown of martyrdom was conferred.

A recent American writer has endeavored to extenuate, if not to excuse, the fault of Marcus Aurelius in consenting to the persecution of the Christians, on the ground that the Christianity of Rome in that day was so disfigured by gross errors and heresies, such as the Ebionite, the Manichæan, the Gnostic, and also the Mithraic worship, that the fair lineaments of the truth could not be discerned. But this is a great error. The victims of the persecution were not errorists, but persons holding the common faith, such as Melito, bishop of Sardis, and Polycarp, bishop of Symrna, as well as the martyrs of a humbler rank, Pothinus, Ponticus and Blandina whose constancy at Lyons has been commemorated with affectionate devotion. Nor was it any peculiarity either of faith or of worship that provoked the wrath of the emperor. It was simply their persistent refusal to worship the gods of the empire. This was an insult to the national divinities. Aurelius himself had no faith in these deities, but as chief of the state, felt himself bound to pay respect to the objects of vulgar adoration. And what he did, surely any one else might be summoned to do. Besides, the Christians fell

under the force of the laws against *caetus illiciti*, and he felt it necessary for the safety of the state to see that it harbored no society differing from it. It was not malice nor frenzy, but a sense of duty to the nation, that led him to resent and punish what he considered the unnatural obstinacy of the Christians. His fault lay in the haughty Stoic pride which hindered him from examining or appreciating the convictions which underlay this so-called obstinacy. Had he stooped to inquire into the wonderful combination of patience and meekness which was displayed, as Minucius tells us, even by women and children when under severe and protracted torture, he must have been convinced that there was a religion stronger and better than any philosophy. In such a case he would have stayed his hand from violence, and so avoided what even Mons. Renan considers a shadow resting upon his memory. He was as unlike Nero as any emperor possibly could be, and yet both have the blood of Christians upon their skirts.

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